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MERLE W. LOPER: TEACHER, MENTOR, FRIEND

*Carlos Diaz**

The other day, a few days before Christmas, I drove to Yarmouth to visit Merle Loper at his home. I hadn't seen or spoken with him for a few months, but the holiday season made me want to reach out to him and wish him well. Merle, after all, was my professor, my mentor, and my friend. For three years I had studied his lessons, shared many of his experiences, and tried to share in his wisdom. On this occasion I brought a basket of wines and cheeses, a small expression of appreciation for all he had shared with me. But when I arrived, I learned that Merle was gone for the holidays, visiting with his daughter in a far away country. I left a note on the door and brought the basket home with me, to keep until he returned.

To his students, Merle was known as a thoughtful teacher. He had made the study of law his life's work, and aspired to find ways to kindle the interest of his students. Literature was one of his favorite means towards this end. Many of his assignments included literary prose, poetry, and selections on philosophy. His students learned the value and importance of law in life through the works of Jeremy Bentham, Judith Grahn, Robert Frost, Virginia Woolf, William Shakespeare, Maya Angelou, and many others. By sharing in his students' enjoyment of literature, he taught us to love the study of law.

Merle also shared his ethical passion in the classroom. He showed us that the law, more than a heartless web of regulations and codes, can be the very expression of our morality. He invited us to discuss the importance of civil disobedience in a society of unjust laws, and the importance of reaffirming humanitarianism through law. He drew from global examples of human rights violations to close the gap between the academic lesson and the daily reality of the importance of the law.

As the executive secretary of the Committee on Judicial Responsibility and Disability, Merle carried out his duties with great integrity and propriety. He was remarkably thorough in his research, always conscious of the weightiness of the tasks at hand. Merle truly appreciated the importance of preserving the integrity of the judiciary. At the same time, he demonstrated profound respect for the dignity of the very jurists who were under scrutiny. His own integrity is reflected in the high degree of respect shown to him by his peers.

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Shortly after Christmas, I learned of Merle's death. I felt a very deep pain at the loss of my teacher, my mentor, and my good friend. The basket of Christmas gifts I brought to his home remains undelivered, but I am warmed by the knowledge that Merle inspired many students to develop our intellectual, ethical, and humanitarian passions.